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SUBJECT: Argentina: Mendoza Governor-elect and Ambassador discuss
crime, education and other priorities

Summary

1. (SBU) Mendoza Province Governor-elect Celso Jaque said his main challenge as governor will be to improve provincial security and to upgrade education infrastructure and standards. In a cordial November 8 meeting with Ambassador, Jaque also acknowledged poor prison conditions in his province, which he pledged to address. Jaque said that he wants to better exploit Mendoza's promising energy and mining sectors. Ambassador and Jaque also discussed the relatively high rate of child labor and school dropout rates in Mendoza, and trafficking in persons. End summary.

Big electoral victory

2. (SBU) A current federal senator, Jaque expressed satisfaction with the provincial and national October 25 election wins by both the Victory Front and Peronist Party. Although historically a Peronist, Jaque did not run under the Victory Front or Peronist Party ballot for this election, but under a different coalition embracing a number of local parties and alliances, but allied to these two groups. He will replace Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's new vice President Julio Cobos. Jaque, however, defeated the candidate supported by his predecessor and new Argentine Vice President Cobos. Jaque won 38% of the provincial vote, far enough ahead of his main rivals to avoid a runoff, and assumes office December 9, a day prior to the presidential inauguration of president-elect Cristina Kirchner Cobos, the latter who ran under the Radical faction aligned with the Victory Front. Cristina Kirchner won just over 60% of the provincial vote. The Victory Front slate also won three of Mendoza's five seats in the national lower house.

But challenges ahead: security and crime, education, information
technology, healthcare, drugs, prison conditions, TIP and the
economy

3. (SBU) Jaque was realistic about the challenges he faces to reform Mendoza's security, education, healthcare, drugs, and prison structures and to strengthen the provincial economy. He acknowledged he will need to work hard to achieve broad consensus to

advance his reform platform, given that the opposition (Radicals and other parties) controls both houses of the provincial Congress.

¶4. (U) Jaque identified growing crime as his top priority. During his campaign, he promised a decrease in crime. He expressed admiration to the Ambassador for former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and his crime-fighting policies, which he said emphasized social inclusion and not merely a "zero tolerance" approach.

¶5. (U) Jaque lamented the "terrible" physical state of most provincial schools, as well as low overall educational standards in his province. Jaque said that he plans to add information technology to the school curriculum, and increase the number of days children must be in school. He also said that the province is in urgent need of better and more housing. Ambassador encouraged Jaque to consult with the Inter-American Development Bank for possible technical assistance and project support in these areas.

¶6. (U) Jaque said that he would step up efforts to fight what he said was an increase in provincial drug use and narcotics trafficking. He said that he plans to launch prevention campaigns and build rehabilitation centers, for which he would welcome any Embassy assistance.

¶7. (U) Jaque also acknowledged the problem of provincial prison overcrowding and brutality. Recently, the Argentine Supreme Court has twice instructed the national and Mendoza governments to report concrete measures taken to improve prison conditions to address several rulings by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on this issue. Jaque said that he has plans to build four new prisons during his term.

¶8. (SBU) Jaque acknowledged the problems of child labor and trafficking in persons in his province. The Ambassador said that we

would be willing to work with Jaque to fight human trafficking. According to official GOA figures, Mendoza suffers from relatively high rates of child labor and school attrition. Although there are no official statistics related to labor or sexual exploitation, given the tourism boom and the acknowledged problem with prostitution in many of Mendoza's urban centers, TIP is a possible concern.

¶9. (SBU) On the economic front, Jaque said he wants to better exploit the promising energy and mining sectors in the province. (On the campaign trail, Jaque had proposed the creation of a provincial energy company to explore and exploit new hydrocarbon areas in conjunction with private companies.) Ambassador and Jaque discussed the highly publicized controversy of Mendoza reporting inflation figures much higher than the national average, and allegations of subsequent GOA manipulation of these provincial figures. Jaque said that, aside from dealing with this problem of "methodology," the GOA needs to also deal with the root cause of inflation.

Jaque biography

¶10. (U) Governor-elect Celso Jaque was born and raised in Mendoza province. He was previously both a national senator and congressman from Mendoza Province, as well as mayor of his hometown of Malargue. He is also a former vice president of the Mendoza Peronist Party. Jaque has also been a teacher and economics researcher. He received an accounting degree from the University of Cuyo. Jaque was born on September 24, 1960, is married and has two daughters.

WAYNE